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DEPARTMENT FOR G/AIAG AND EUR/WE

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SUBJECT: SPAIN: AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE

REF: MADRID 2877 AND PREVIOUS

[¶1.](#) (SBU) Spanish Deputy Health Minister Fernando Puig told the DCM December 7 that he believed that the threat of Avian Influenza had been exaggerated and that the health systems in place in the developed world, including in Spain, should be able to contain and limit the impact of any future outbreak of Bird Flu.

[¶2.](#) (U) On December 19, Spanish Health Minister Elena Salgado, the coordinator of Spain's inter-ministerial Avian Influenza "National Executive Committee," released a communique underscoring the serious nature of the threat of Avian Influenza and outlining recent steps taken by the National Executive Committee to meet the threat. In the communique, Salgado is quoted saying that "the H5N1 virus continues to be a cause for concern for human health because the risk of efficient human-to-human transmission remains and could cause a pandemic." As a result, Salgado added "our message regarding the risk assessment has not changed; it is still impossible to predict when the H5N1 virus will acquire the ability to be efficiently transmitted between humans, or even whether this circumstance (i.e., efficient human-to-human transmission) will even occur." "It could take years, but it is fundamental that we maintain active warning systems and that our response plans be ready for activation at any time." Developments highlighted in Salgado's press release included:

-- By early January 2007, Spain would have on hand the 10 million antiviral treatments that it had ordered in early [¶2006](#).

-- Spain's Avian Influenza National Preparation and Response Plan conforms with WHO recommendations and Spain remains in constant contact with the WHO and EU regarding Avian Influenza issues.

-- Spain has adopted the Avian Flu-related elements of the WHO's new International Health Rules.

-- Spain's regions, which have responsibility for implementing health policy, have all adopted regional Avian Influenza preparedness plans.

-- These regional plans include detailed procedures on detection, treatment, antiviral administration, emergency response, etc.

[¶3.](#) (U) Salgado also underscored that the European Center for Disease Control had evaluated Spain's Avian Influenza planning in October and had given Spain "very positive" marks

on both the national and regional levels. She said that the evaluation had also noted that Spain's plans mesh well with those of the EU and WHO.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: Salgado's remarks and the Avian Influenza National Executive Committee's communique demonstrate that GOS officials, in their public statements, continue to take quite seriously the threat of Avian Influenza. Spanish Avian Influenza planning has been effective and does indeed, to the best of our knowledge, conform with WHO and EU guidelines. Puig's remarks to the DCM, however, illustrate that many senior GOS health officials believe that the threat of Avian Influenza has been exaggerated. This theme of "exaggerated threat" has been a constant feature in Madrid ESTHOFF's interactions with GOS health officials on Avian Influenza. But we have seen no signs that these private doubts have led Spain to lower its public Avian Influenza policy guard.
AGUIRRE